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‘First Strike’ logistics made ‘Easy’

2nd Lt. Matt Horstman
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FOB MAHMUDIYAH, Iraq – When the 101st Airborne Division transformed itself in 2004, one of the most significant changes to the structure of the Brigade Combat Team was the establishment of a forward support company to act in direct support of the maneuver battalion.

Company E, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, is the support company for the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Abn. Div., bringing unprecedented logistical capabilities to the infantrymen of “First Strike.”

The mechanics, cooks, fuelers and transport vehicle operators of Co. E are performing a lot of support missions in Multi-National Division – Baghdad’s area of operations, and true to the company’s motto, are making it look “easy.”

“I am not aware of any other FSC in a light division that operates like we do, as transformation intended, attached to our maneuver infantry battalion, forward from the large brigade support areas like Striker, Liberty and Falcon,” said Capt. Mark Whiteman,

commander, Co. E, 526th BSB. “And we love it. We love supporting these guys down here in the middle of the fight and re-writing the history books together with our ‘First Strike’ family. For example, a couple of years ago in Iraq, an infantry battalion would have to wait weeks, maybe months for a set of broken equipment to make its way through the maintenance repair system to get fixed. Now with the Forward Support Company co-located with the infantry, our night vision repair shop here can inspect, order a part if necessary and repair the equipment within days.”

In order to keep combat power on the battlefield, the company’s maintenance section embraced the “fix forward” concept, by positioning teams of mechanics at each of the battalions’ three patrol bases to service and repair vehicles on site, performing engine replacement jobs and other complex tasks previously evacuated to higher levels of maintenance during the pre-transformation era.

“When we blow an engine, we must rely on our maintenance automation systems and our satellite to order one from the services and support area at Camp Striker. We have no motor pool next door to do a ‘deal’ with – so we have to be that much better at maintaining our fleet and ordering parts. But the system works,” said Sgt. Bobby Ingram, repair parts noncommissioned officer, referring to the re-supply he receives from Camp Striker that carries the parts he ordered in his computer just a few days prior.

In addition to fixing Task Force Talon’s equipment, the company must cook all the meals for nearly 1,000 Soldiers spread across three different bases.

“There’s no KBR dining facilities down here,” said Sgt. Justin Hill, rations noncommissioned officer, 526th BSB. “I know it is rare elsewhere in Iraq, but here we actually do what we were trained to do – cook.”

Hill has the responsibility of electronically ordering the rations, receiving and downloading the delivery trucks when they arrive at the forward operating base and preparing loads to be sent forward to his fellow cooks, who live and work at the patrol bases via combat-replenishment operation convoys.

The company's distribution platoon conducts the combat-replenishment operation to the austere patrol bases at Yusifiyah, Lutafiyah, and JS Bridge – traversing some of the most dangerous terrain in Iraq in order to deliver mission-critical supplies and mail.

“It feels great to roll into these patrol bases and see the Soldiers' morale instantly skyrocket knowing their mail has arrived, the new M1114 transmission they've been waiting on came in, new flavors of ice cream will be in the kitchen and the porta-johns will be cleaned,” said 1st Lt. Jason Abbott, distribution platoon leader, Co. E, 526th BSB. “We are definitely full service. My guys will do anything and go anywhere to support ‘First Strike.’” More than 85 percent of Abbott's Soldiers have earned the Combat Action Badge due to various attacks on his re-supply convoys throughout the area of operation.

“Now that we have ‘Easy’ as part of our team, I can't imagine how we managed to get logistics done prior to transformation,” said Maj. Fred Wintrich, executive officer, 1st Bn., 502nd Inf. Regt. “This company continues to amaze me each and every day – from maintaining 115 M1114s, cooking three hot meals a day, to emplacing more than 1,000 barriers so far in sector – and they truly live up to their name by making it look easy.”



Repair.

BAGHDAD – Spc. Jason Klimesh, a Ridgeway, Iowa, native and small-arms repairman with Company E, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, works on an M119 howitzer flywheel in order to bring one of Forward Operating Base Mahmudiyah North's guns back to full mission capability.

(U.S. Army photo by Capt. Mark Whiteman, Co. E, 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.)



Slingload.

BAGHDAD – Distribution platoon members, Staff Sgt. Eric Curtis of Troy, Ala., (left) and Spc. Norberto Preciado, from Baytown, Texas (right), both from Company E, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, conduct a slingload operation to re-supply a forward patrol base.

(U.S. Army photo by Capt. Mark Whiteman, Co. E, 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.)



Tune up.

BAGHDAD – Spc. Melissa Toledo, a Leicester, Mass., native who serves as a wheeled vehicle mechanic with Company E, 526th Brigade Support Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, gives an M1114 a tune-up. (U.S. Army photo courtesy of 526th BSB, 2nd BCT, 101st Abn. Div.)